



U.S. Department of Justice

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EVENT: Guilty Verdict

Defendant: Joel Laird and Michael Wright

DEFENDANTS CONVICTED BY JURY IN PORT HURON OF DRUG AND GUN CHARGES

On November 18, 2004, a jury sitting in Port Huron, convicted two Defendants of serious criminal charges including Possession with Intent to Distribute Crack Cocaine, Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon and Possession of a Firearm in Furtherance of a Drug trafficking Crime, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today. Mr. Murphy was joined in the announcement by Special Agent in Charge Valerie J. Goddard, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). The case was prosecuted under the Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative.

Joel Laird, 31, of Detroit, and Michael Wright, 34, of Detroit, were convicted after a 5 day jury trial, United States District Judge Lawrence P. Zatkoff, presiding.

Laird and Wright were arrested following the execution of a search warrant on

September 14, 2004, by Detroit Police officers, Narcotics Enforcement Unit, at a location in Detroit, MI. The dwelling was known as a narcotics trafficking location. At the time of the search Laird was found sitting at a table in the living room area of the house. Recovered from on top of the table was a Bryco Arms semi-automatic handgun, obliterated serial number, loaded with 4 live rounds, 6.48 grams of cocaine base, narcotics packaging, a digital scale and a laptop computer. Wright was detained by the police officers as he ran from the southwest bedroom of the house. While running, Wright was observed throwing a tin can into the southwest bedroom. Recovered from the southwest bedroom was the tin can, which contained 16 ziplocks of crack cocaine totaling 5.58 grams, and a Ruger. .44 caliber firearm, loaded with 6 live rounds.

Both Laird and Wright have prior felony criminal convictions. Laird was previously convicted of Bank Robbery in 1996. Wright has prior felony convictions for Armed Robbery, 1990; Possession of Cocaine, less than 50 grams, 1990, and Breaking and Entering Occupied Dwelling with Intent, 1990. Both Laird and Wright face a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years. Wright will be sentenced as a career offender, with potential sentencing guidelines of 262-327 months.

United States Attorney Murphy stated, "This case is another example of the excellent team-work among local and federal agencies to take guns and drugs off our streets. In particular, I would like to commend the officers of the Detroit Police Department and agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives."

Special Agent in Charge Goddard said, "Working closely with our state and local partners, the Project Safe Neighborhood initiative helps make our neighborhoods safer by

getting armed drug dealers and other violent criminals with firearms off our streets. ATF is proud to be a partner in this important initiative.”

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Susan Gillooly and ATF Task Force Agent Steve Hassler.